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## Helen Dunn Memoir

### Dunn, Helen

Interview and memoir

Digital Audio File, 18 min., 9 pp.

UIS Alumni Sage Society

Dunn discusses her experiences attending Sangamon State University. She was a member of the first graduating class in 1972 with a major in Psychology to help her move from being a teacher to a principal in the education profession. She was the Grand Marshall of the UIS Homecoming Parade in 2006, when the Homecoming activities were revived from the early days at SSU.

Interview by Janice Spears, 2008

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Narrator: Helen Dunn  
Date: July 16, 2008  
Place: Springfield, IL  
Interviewer: Janice Spears

Q. This is Janice Spears interviewing Helen Dunn on Wednesday July 16, at UIS. Helen, would you like to tell me a little bit about yourself?

A. I was one of the first students and in the first graduating class. And I don't know what else you need to know.

Q. Well what year did you start out here?

A. Did I start?

Q. Uh-huh.

A. Oh, that I don't even know! I know I graduated in '72. And so that much I know.

Q. And it was a master's degree in...

A. Psychology.

Q. OK. You were married at the time?

A. Yes.

Q. And had children.

A. I had seven. Let' see, was I – no, I had, my husband had died when I graduated. I had forgotten how long ago that was.

Q. All right. Well, prior to attending SSU, what was the extent of your post-secondary education, if any?

A. I had gone to ISU. And I had started at when we lived in Champaign – over there in Champaign. I went to school at U of I and had a good part of it finished. And so I had classes already done.

Q. So you had your bachelor's degree before you came to SSU?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Was that bachelor's from ISU or...

A. Uh-huh, ISU.

Q. What year was that?

A. Forty...what, two?

Q. 1942?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. What goals or circumstances prompted you to apply to SSU?

A. Convenience first of all because my husband had died and I had seven children. And I needed – I thought it was a chance for me to move ahead a little bit maybe, if I had it finished.

Q. You were a teacher at the time?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. And you were working on a master's in psychology.

A. Uh-huh.

Q. What years did you attend?

A. Out here?

Q. Yes. Or did you start at the downtown capitol campus?

A. I went there first. So I was downtown and then out here...in the mud.

Q. Describe in detail your initial impressions of the campus and your classes.

A. There wasn't much of a campus, we just went to – we had classes downtown and out here they were in all kinds of places. Not the usual classrooms at all. But we enjoyed it, we had fun, lots of fun.

Q. What was your impression of the classes compared to the ones you had taken at ISU?

A. Totally different.

Q. What was different, Helen?

A. It was so much more informal. You got closer to the people who were in the class then you ever did at ISU. There it was very typical, and here it was not.

Q. Did your impressions of the University or its classes change in the course of your studies?

A. Over the years, we became very close to the other classmates. We all became close to each other. We had a lot of friends out here. And I still have the same friends, some of them.

Q. Where you also friends with your instructors?

A. Yes, very much so. Because my husband died during that time and so they really influenced me a great deal and kept me going to school because I might have quit.

Q. So you were a mother of seven, you were working full time as a teacher?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. And taking classes at nights and weekends here?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Identify and describe two or three of the most memorable professors, good or bad.

A. We had fun with Jim Pancrazio. In fact we went back to his house sometimes after class and partied really – and that was at his instigation we didn't – he was babysitting at the time. And that was his way of finishing up his babysitting time. He'd let us go to his house and tell us where he was going and leave us there. And so there we were with the boys, probably asleep by that time. So we went back there.

Q. Any other professors that good or bad...

A. Dan Whitley was great. But then he has died and so we don't have him around anymore. Pancrazio was awarded a remembrance here a couple of years ago, I think one of those...

Q. From the alumni?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. And has his portrait in Brookens Library.

A. Right.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And he was – had gray hair which was different, so did I.

Q. Any other professors that you have a fond memory of?

A. You mentioned Caryl Moy, I had her for a class. I had – oh, what's her name that got one of the awards last year...can't even think of her name.

Q. Mary Lou Burnett?

A. Yes, I had her for class. Uh-huh. That's funny.

Q. In the early years of SSU, University Week was a special feature of the curriculum. Did you enroll in or attend any of the University Week events?

A. I know I did, but I couldn't tell you now. Uh-huh.

Q. Did you have a favorite classroom on campus or downtown?

A. No! We had classes in strange places. We had... one class couldn't find a space and we ended up out at Crows Mill School.

Q. Which was really Crows Mill School, wasn't it?

A. It was. But we were in the basement.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And so we ended up down there because there was space.

Q. That's very casual!

A. We had a lot of fun.

Q. Have you stayed in touch with any students, staff members, or professors that you knew at that time and you might want to mention any special acquaintanceships.

A. Yes, Judy Victor was just married a couple of weeks ago. And I was – came home from Arizona to go to her wedding.

Q. And who is Judy Victor?

A. She was a classmate.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And so we had – we still had several people who went out to eat with us once and awhile. We'd meet about once a month and go to dinner somewhere and then go back to class. Let's see... Jan Cellini. I don't see her anymore, I don't know where she is. She's around somewhere but I don't see her. I'm sorry, at Bill's one night, but we were there. Let's see and another one or two have died. My goodness. Uh-huh. It's changed.

Q. Were there any campus practices, for example pass/fail grading, casual attire, unstructured class discussion, unusual topics in the courses, that impressed you strongly?

A. Classes were very casual and you could really introduce any conversation that you wanted into the classroom, very casually. In fact when my husband died, I brought my two youngest boys out here with me because I couldn't leave them at home. They were eleven and twelve, I could have left them at home. But I didn't and I brought them out here and they sat in the room down here where – in this, connected to this building. Where there were sports.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. They had table tennis and a few other things in there. And the boys used to do their homework and then come back out and get to work.

Q. It was a great convenience, wasn't it?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. To be able to bring your children to...

A. Yes, you can't take them to many schools. And they enjoyed it.

Q. Any comments you want to make about the nontraditional things about SSU? How it was then?

A. It certainly was not like a class.

Q. Did you and other students have a favorite off-campus meeting place?

A. I don't think so because we used to plan where we'd go for dinner the next – when we'd meet for dinner we'd make a plan about where we would go the next time. But we did get together...I had a good time.

Q. After class?

A. Uh-huh. And Laverne Holtman is one who's died, she taught at Lanphier I think. And we used to meet her quite a bit and her husband had died too. We met – kept in touch with him for awhile. But then he died.

Q. Was she also in the first graduating class?

A. Yes she was.

Q. Laverne Holtman?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. In recent years how often, per year, do you visit the campus and why?

A. Until this last year I've been out here a lot. But I haven't been this past year.

Q. What kinds of things are you out here for?

A. We've been out here for meetings, we've been out here for all kinds of things. Events, we've always come to some of the events held out here.

Q. In the auditorium?

A. Uh-huh. We've always done that, my own children and...

Q. Alumni events too?

A. Yes. I go to all the alumni events usually.

Q. And what about the first homecoming?

A. Hmm! Well, which one do you call the first?

Q. Well, the one two years ago, which you were...

A. Would be the first?

Q. I think so. The first parade.

A. Uh-huh. It was the first parade.

Q. First parade.

A. Uh-huh.

Q. And what was your part in that?

A. Ha! I got to ride in a convertible and we led the parade.

Q. Uh-huh. Grand Marshall?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Because you were in the first graduating class.

A. Right, right.

Q. What did you think of that?

A. It was fun. I never would have been in a parade like that, at the front.

Q. In retrospect, was the value of the education you received?

A. Probably acquaintances. I know so many people that I would never have known if I haven't come out here. And so they're still around.

Q. Did it help you in your profession as a teacher?

A. Yes. Yes it did. And I was – then I was a principal.

Q. Where were you principal?

A. I was principal at Edinburg and my goodness, I can't even remember.

Q. In Springfield?

A. No I was not a principal in Springfield.

Q. Oh, but you taught school there?

A. I taught in Springfield, yes.

Q. And in Athens?

A. Uh-huh. Williamsville, all around.

Q. In retrospect, how if at all, did your experiences at SSU influence your career and personal life?



A. It kept me in education forever. Not quite forever but for quite awhile. And I was... I know many, many of the teachers in the area yet.

Q. What about former students? Do you ever hear from any of them?

A. I hear from some of the high school ones. They still call me. I may get a call in the middle of the night, somebody's having a problem and they think I can still solve it, long-distance! They just, they call. And my own children can recognize some of the voices anymore. Somebody will call and they'll say it's Bob, Ed, or it's so-and-so. They know who it is.

Q. Is there anything else that you would like to say for the Archives, that you would like them to know about your experiences?

A. I don't know – we had a good time when we were here. I remember when the middle of campus used to fill up with water and everybody was out here with their shoes and socks off walking around in the puddles, having a good time. Carrying shoes – didn't think of putting boots on.

Q. Anything else, Helen?

A. Oh, I'm trying to think. I should have thought about some of these things a little earlier.

Q. Well if that's it we will conclude this interview with Helen Dunn.

End of Interview

17 minutes 47 seconds